



Review Of ReseaRch

ISSN: 2249-894X

Impact Factor : 5.2331(UIF)

Volume - 7 | Issue - 4 | January - 2018

UGC Approved JoUrnaI no. 48514



AN EVALUATION OF SAINTS AND TEACHERS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT—

The genesis of the Bhakti movement lies in the social evils prevalent in the-then Hindu society. Hindu society was full of many social anomalies like rigidity of caste system, irrelevant rituals and religious practices, blind faiths and social dogmas. The society also suffered from polytheism, segregation, severe economic disparity due to casteism,

burden on the poor people. The Islamic principles of one God, equality and fraternity of mankind and complete surrender to God appealed to the liberal Hindus. The Bhakti Movement was led by the Hindu liberals who emphasized aspects like equality irrespective of caste, creed, and colour, virtues of kindness of heart and mind, devotion to one God (monotheism), freedom from all kinds of ritualism and preaching in the language of the common people.[1]



untouchability etc. The Bhakti movement began with the aim of reforming Hinduism. The rigid caste system in Hinduism had created discontent among the Hindus. People from the lower caste were looked upon as untouchables and were oppressed by the upper caste many meaningless and expensive rituals started being practiced in Hinduism. They put financial

KEY WORDS: Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Basवेशwara, Allama Prabhu, Akka Mahadevi, Shivayogi Siddarama, Purandara Dasa, Kanakadasa.

INTRODUCTION :

Bhakti movement is a pan Indian phenomenon that swept the country during the interval between the eighth century and eighteenth century even though the concept of Bhakti has its genesis in Bhagavadgeetha itself. (Bhakti Yoga) It is perceived as a rebellion against the iron clad traditions and mores of the caste system and the religious hegemony that was prevalent all over the country. It had certain basic tenets which were common to all the regions of the country irrespective of linguistic identity. Denial of a mediation by the priestly class, a theistic and secular belief systems, negation of pomp and splendor, preference given to regional languages as against classical languages like Sanskrit et al are some of these features. There are many movements which have striven hard to realize these goals. Bhakti movement had its origin in Tamilnadu. It was set in motion by the sixty three Nayanars, the Shaivite saints and twelve Alvars their Vaishnavism counterparts. Krishna bhakti cult of Gaurang Chaitanya and Saint Meera, the movement

lead by Kabir and Tulasidas in North India and Maharashtrian cults of Saint Tukaram and Sant Jnaneshvar constitute the Indo Aryan core of the movement. On the other hand Nayanars the devotees of Shiva and Alvars the devotees of Vishnu from Tamilnadu have contributed to the Dravidian component of the Bhakti movement. Sikh religion founded by Guru Nanak too played a crucial role. Sufi movement which originates from the Islam had its own share in furthering this movement, also in the context of Karnataka^[2]. Of course there are many others who have made unique contributions in the context of their religion. In this context the present article attempts to fulfil the research gap.

AN EVALUATION OF SAINTS AND TEACHERS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT Shankaracharya 788 - 820 CE.

Shankaracharya consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta. He is credited with unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism. His works in Sanskrit discuss the unity of the Ātman and Nirguna Brahman "brahman without attributes". His works elaborate on ideas found in the Upanishads. Shankara's publications criticised the ritually-oriented Mīmāṃsā school of Hinduism. He also explained the key difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, stating that Hinduism asserts "Ātman (Soul, Self) exists", while Buddhism asserts that there is "no Soul, no Self".

Shankara travelled across the Indian subcontinent to propagate his philosophy through discourses and debates with other thinkers^[3]. He established the importance of monastic life as sanctioned in the Upanishads and Brahma Sutra, in a time when the Mīmāṃsā School established strict ritualism and ridiculed monasticism.



Ramanuja 1017-1137 CE.

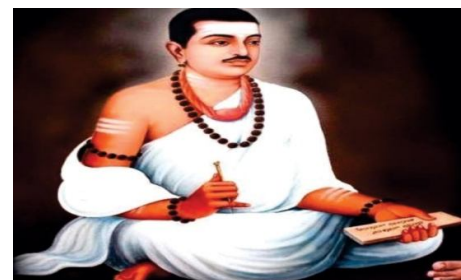
Ramanuja was deeply influenced by the 12 alvars or Vaishnavism poet-saints, who were immersed in bhakti or devotion towards Narayana. So, Ramanuja was an exponent of the Sri Vaishnavism tradition. Through bhakti, Ramanujacharya advocated saranagati or total surrender to God. Ramanuja gave a philosophic basis to the teachings of Vaishnavism. Ramanuja built up the philosophy of Visishtadvaita. Ramanuja believed Brahma as Supreme and individual souls as modes or attributes of Brahma. God is attainable by soul through Bhakti^[4]. He held that so called

Shudras and outcastes could also attain salvation by completely surrendering to the will of the guru. Literary works: Traditionally 9 Sanskrit texts, including Vedartha Sangraham, Sri Bhashyam, and Gita Bhashyam.



Basveshwara 1131-1196 CE

Basavanna was an Indian 12th-century statesman, philosopher, poet, Lingayat saint in the Shiva-focussed Bhakti movement. He spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas. Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals but introduced Ishtalinga necklace, with an image of the Shiva Liṅga, to every person regardless of his or her birth, to be a constant reminder of one's bhakti (devotion) to Shiva. He introduced new public institutions such as the Anubhava Mantapa (or, the "hall of spiritual experience"), which welcomed men and women from all



socio-economic backgrounds to discuss

spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open. Basava was the founder of the Lingayat. How was a propagator of Visishtadvaita? Basavanna literary works include the Vachana Sahitya in Kannada Language. He is also known as Bhakti Bhandari, Basavanna or Basaveswara.

Allama Prabhu

Allama Prabhu was a 12th-century mystic-saint and *Vachana* poet (called *Vachanakara*) of the Kannada language, propagating the unitary consciousness of self and Shiva. Allama Prabhu is one of the celebrated poets and the patron saint of the Lingayata movement that reshaped medieval Karnataka society and popular Kannada literature. He is included among the "Trinity of Lingayatism (Veera Shaivism)", along with Basavanna, the founder of the movement, and Akka Mahadevi, the most prominent woman poet. Allama Prabhu used poetry, now part of Vachana sahitya literature, to criticise rituals and social conventions, to breakdown social barriers and to emphasize moral values and devotional worship of Shiva. It is well accepted that though Basavanna was the inspiration behind the Veerashaiva movement and earned the honorific "elder brother" (anna) at the "mansion of experience" (Anubhava Mandapa), Allama was the real Guru who presided over it. According to the scholars K. A. Nilakanta Sastri and Joseph T. Shipley, Vachana literature comprises pithy pieces of poetic prose in easy to understand, yet compelling Kannada language. The scholar E. P. Rice characterises Vachana poems as brief parallelistic allusive poems, each ending with one of the popular local names of the god Shiva and preaching the common folk detachment from wordly pleasures and adherence to devotion to the god Shiva (Shiva Bhakti). The biographical details of Allama Prabhu that can be historically verified are scanty, and much that is known about him is from hagiographic legends. Some details of the early life of Allama are available in the writings of noted Hoysala poet Harihara, while other accounts are generally considered legendary. Allama Prabhu was born in Shimoga district of Karnataka, India, in the 12th century, to Sujnani and Nirashankara. He was a contemporary of the other famous Veerashaiva devotee-poets (sharanas), Basavanna and Akka Mahadevi. According to Harihara's biography of Allama, the earliest account of the saint's life, he was a temple drummer in modern Shivamogga district, Karnataka state, India. He came from a family of temple performers, was himself an expert at playing the type of drum called maddale, and his father was a dance teacher^[5].



Allama Prabhu married a dancer named Kamalathe, but she died prematurely. The grief-stricken Allama wandered aimlessly, arriving at a cave temple, where he met the saint Animisayya (or Animisha, "the open eyed one"). The saint gave him a linga icon, blessed him with knowledge on god, and, Allama was enlightened and transformed into a seeker of spirituality. Allama's pen name, (ankita or mudra), Guheshvara the god who stays with everyone in the heart cave (also spelt Guheswara or Guhesvara, lit, "Lord of the caves"), which he used in most of his poems is said to be a celebration of his experience in the cave temple. Allama Prabhu spread his message with songs, playing a lyre as he wandered from place to place. Most of his compositions were spontaneous and in vernacular language, but some were written in Sandhya Bhasha (a code filled language of secret doctrines understood by Yogi Sidhas), a riddle-filled questions-packed poetry in the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition. Allama Prabhu's poetic style has been described as mystic and cryptic, rich in paradoxes and inversions (bedagu mode), staunchly against any form of symbolism, occult powers (siddhis) and their acquisition, temple worship, conventional systems and ritualistic practices, and even critical of fellow Veerashaiva devotees and poets. However, all his poems are non-sectarian and some of them even use straight forward language. About 1,300 hymns are attributed to him. According to the Kannada scholar Shiva Prakash, Allama's poems are more akin to the Koans (riddles) in the Japanese Zen tradition, and have the effect of awakening the senses out of complacency. Critic Joseph Shipley simply categorises Allama's poems as those

of a "perfect Jnani" ("saint"). Some of Allama's poems are known to question and probe the absolute rejection of the temporal by fellow Veerashaiva devotees—even Basavanna was not spared. A poem of his mocks at Akka Mahadevi for covering her nudity with tresses, while flaunting it to the world at the same time, in an act of rejection of pleasures. The scholar Basavaraju compiled 1321 extant poems of Allama Prabhu in his work *Allamana Vachana Chandrike* (1960). These poems are known to cover an entire range, from devotion to final union with God.

The poems give little information about Allama's early life and worldly experiences before enlightenment. In the words of the scholar Ramanujan, to a saint like Allama, "the butterfly has no memory of the caterpillar". His wisdom is reflected in his poems—only a small portion of which are on the devotee aspect (bhakta, poems 64–112). More than half of the poems dwell on the later phase (sthala) in the life of a saint, most are about union with god and of realization (aikya, poems 606–1321). His poems use the phrase "Lord of the caves" or "Guheswara" to refer to Shiva, and this practice states Subramanian is because Allama Prabhu received his enlightenment in a cave temple^[6].

Akka Mahadevi

Place: Udupadi in Shivamogga District, Karnataka Period: 12th Century

At 16, Mahadevi was the epitome of beauty. While other girls of her age dreamt of prospective bridegrooms, she decided to wed Shiva, more precisely, Chenna Mallikarjuna (the beautiful Lord, pure as Jasmine). The daughter of devoted parents, she was initiated into bhakthi at the age of seven; by 16, she was almost a saint. But, when King Koushika's eyes fell on her, she was forced to marry him. Koushika challenged Mahadevi's stand that she only belonged to Shiva. When he pointed out that everything she had belonged to him, she discarded everything, including her clothes, and left the palace.



The very next minute, long tresses covered her nakedness. She went to Kalyan, a haven for devotees of Shiva, and joined a group called 'Veera Saiva'. There, in the 'Anubhava Mandapa', a platform for open debate on various issues including philosophy and social reform, Mahadevi spoke fearlessly. Her conviction earned her the honorific title, 'Akka', meaning 'elder sister'.

In the company of Basavanna, Chenna Basavanna, Prabhudeva and Madivalayya, her devotion attained maturity. It is believed that at the age of 25, she found the Kadali vana in the vicinity of the Shrishaila temple and lived the rest of her life in a cave. As she continued to meditate, Akka's concept of Chenna Mallikarjuna changed from that of the Puranic Shiva to the formless Divine — the one who pervaded her soul. She saw the Absolute in everything. Every tree was the kalpavriksha, every bush was the Sanjeevani, every place was a teertha, every water body contained Amritha and every pebble was the chintamani gem. Her very breath became His fragrance. His form became hers. Having known Him, there was nothing else to know. She became the bee that drank the nectar of Chenna Mallikarjuna, and dissolved into it. What remained was – "Nothing, none whatsoever"! Akka Mahadevi's experiences, both spiritual and domestic, poured out in the form of simple stanzas (vachanas) in Kannada. Set in colloquial language and filled with true-to-life similes, her vachanas penetrate the conscience of the reader with their depth of meaning and lyrical beauty^[7]. They number over 300 and feature in *Yoganga Trividhi*, treated as a text book by advanced sadhakas. Her life was a testimony to the power of courage and faith. She gave up her social position and domestic security for the company of Shiva. She fought to prove that every soul, irrespective of gender, has a right to explore and reach the Divine. She was a revolutionary, a social reformer, an ardent devotee and a great poet. Her similes stun the reader with

their simplicity and appropriateness. She wrote: "Like treasure hidden in the ground, like flavour in the fruit, like gold in the rock and oil in the seed, the Absolute is hidden in the heart."

"Like the peacock that dances on a hill, like the swan that splashes around a lake, like the cuckoo that sings when the mango tree bursts into bloom, like the bee that enjoys only the fragrant flower, I will enjoy only my Lord Chennamallikarjuna." Her advice to a devotee is simple but intense – "Shoot the arrow so forcefully that while penetrating the target, even the feathers go in. Hug the body of the Lord so tightly that the bones crumble..."

Akka leaves Kalyana with this following vachana:

"Having vanquished the six passions and become
The trinity of body, thought and speech;
Having ended the trinity and become twain – I and the Absolute
Having ended the duality and become a unity
Is because of the grace of you all.
I salute Basavanna and all assembled here
blessed was I by Allama my Master-
Bless me all that I may join my Chenna Mallikarjuna
Good-bye! Good-bye!"

In the first phase of her life she renounced worldly objects and attractions; in the second, she discarded all object-based rules and regulations. In the third phase she began her journey towards Srishila, location of the temple to Chenna Mallikarjuna and a holy place for devotees of Shiva since before the 12th century. Akka's spiritual journey ended at Kadali, the thick forest area of Shrisaila (Srisaillam) where she is supposed to have experienced union (aikya) with Chennamallikarjuna. One of her famous vachana translates as: People, Male and female, blush when a cloth covering their shame comes loose.

Shivayogi Siddarama

Siddharama (Siddharameswara) (Siddarama of Solapur) - is one of the five prophets of Lingayat religion. He was a great mystic and a Kannada poet who was a part Basavanna's Lingayat revolution during the 12th century. Siddharama claims to have written 68,000 vachanas out of which 1379 are in existence. His philosophy was one of service to mankind, the path of karma yoga. He shares the world view of other Vachana poets in his rejection of blind conventions and caste and sex discrimination and emphasis on realization through personal experience. He too borrows Metaphors from diverse spheres of everyday life. Apart from vachanas, he has written several devotional works in tripadi. Siddharama is qualified with writings in tripadi three-line verse, operational from 7th century. He was a king of Sonnalgi or Solapur. As part of Lingayat revolution in 12th century, he encouraged inter-caste marriages. He undertook many irrigation projects for the common good. He wrote many Vachanas. He saw divinity in every existence of the world. Shri Siddharameshwar was a historical figure of the 12th century whose "Karma yoga" on his own native land-Solapur, turned him into a God-figure over the course of time. There was a great saint Shri Siddarama, who preached the teachings of Shri. Basaweshwara. He was building lakes and temples. He encouraged people to conduct mass weddings, and do other works, which would benefit mankind. Many people joined him and transformed Sonnalige into a prominent place. Allama and Siddarama came to Kalyana. At Anubhava Mantapa Allama, Siddarama, Chennabasavanna, Basavanna, and



others discussed the need for Istalinga. Siddarama accepted Chennabasavanna as his Guru. Chennabasavanna performed the Istalinga initiation (Ishtalinga Deeksha) for Siddarama.

Shivayogi Siddharama praises Guru Channabasavanna in his vachana:

That blazing sun is enthroned
 In the eight petalled Lotus Heart
 The Moon is enthroned in the centre of that sun
 Fire is seated in the centre of that moon
 The glow is seated in the centre of that fire
 Enlightenment dwells
 In the centre of that glow
 Enlightened soul resides in that enlightenment
 Shiva the Supreme inhabits
 The centre of that enlightened soul
 Such a supreme Lord
 Placed His hand on the head of my enlightened body
 Forged it into a shape from the
 Senses of the mind and feeling
 And revealed it to my sight
 And gave Linga to my palm
 To the blessed feet of Channabasavanna
 I bow again and again and thus
 Will I live O Prabhu,
 O Lord Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna

Purandara Dasa

Purandara Dasa was a Haridasa philosopher-saint from present-day Karnataka. He was a composer, singer and one of the chief founding-proponents of South Indian classical music (Carnatic music). Purandara Dasa is noted for composing Dasa Sahithya, as a Bhakti movement vocalist, and a music scholar. His practice was emulated by his younger contemporary, Kanakadasa. Purandara Dasa systematized the method of teaching Carnatic music which is followed to the present day. He introduced the raga Mayamalavagowla as the basic scale for music instruction and fashioned a series of graded lessons such as swaravalis, janti



swaras, alankaras, lakshana geetas, prabandhas, ugabhogas, daatu varase, geeta, sooladis and kritis. Another contribution was the fusion of bhava, raga, and laya in his compositions. He included comments on ordinary daily life and elements of colloquial language in his lyrics. He introduced folk ragas into the mainstream, setting his lyrics to ragas of his day so that even a common man could learn and sing them. He also composed a number of lakshya and lakshana geetas, many of which are sung to this day^[8].

His sooladis are regarded musical masterpieces and are the standard for raga lakshana. Scholars attribute the standardization of Varnamettus entirely to Purandara Dasa. Travelling Haridasa successors are said to have followed the systems he devised, orally transmitted his compositions. According to traditional sources, his compositions number as many as 4,75, 000. His original collection of songs is referred to as Purandaropanishat as given by Vyasatirtha out of which only 1000 are available right now. Purandara

Dasa was a vageyakara (composer-performer), a lakshanakara (musicologist), and the founder of musical pedagogy. Musicologists call him the Sangeeta Pitamaha (lit. "Grandfather") of Carnatic music.

Kanakadasa 1509-1609 CE.

In the same vein as Purandara Dasa, Kanaka Dasa was a great poet and musician from Karnataka. He belonged to the warrior community known as the Kurube Gowda. He later followed the Haridasa tradition and became a poet who wrote lovely Kannada lyrics. Thimmappa Nayaka was Kanaka Dasa's birth name. His folks were Biregowda and Beechamma, and he was brought into the world in the year 1509. Even though he was a little bit younger, he was Purandara Dasa's contemporary. He was defeated and fatally wounded in a battle when he was a young man, but he miraculously survived. He quit his job as a result of this incident and decided to follow a spiritual path. Vyasaraja, his spiritual master, changed his name to Kanaka Dasa after he joined the Haridasa tradition. Beautiful works of literature in Kannada were written by Kanaka Dasa. He was a poet-composer, a social and religious reformer, and a Lord Vishnu devotee. He was a social reformer who took aim at society's flaws, such as the caste system and the gap between the rich and poor.



Kanaka Dasa's Compositions

The writings of Kanakadasa touched not only devotional but also social issues. In fact, his Ramadhyancharitre is an allegorical work that shows how rich and poor people are separated. In the past, rich people in Karnataka ate rice for a living, while the poor ate raagi. However rice was once noted as the rich man's food, it needs supplements, while Raagi is a quality food that is wealthy in supplement esteem. In his fascinating abstract work, the two food grains go to Ruler Rama and request that he resolve their question - and let them know who among them is unrivaled. They are both sentenced to six months in prison by Shri Rama. Toward the finish of that period, the rice has become spoilt, while the solid Raagi actually stays sound. It is said that this is a symbol of the struggle between the wealthy and the working class. His Nalacharite is a wonderful piece retelling the tale of Nala and Damayanthi which shows up in the Mahabharata. His Narasimastava is a magnificent structure on Master Narasimha. The Mohanatarangini recounts the account of Sri Krishna's existence with his spouses and the narrative of Krishna's grandson Aniruddha's adoration for Usha, the girl of Banasura. The majority of the Mohanatarangini is set in Dwaraka. However, foreign travelers' descriptions of Vijayanagara match those of the city of Dwaraka. Because of this, the reader gets the impression that he was describing a recent event.

Kanaka Dasa as the Eternal Devotee

Not only was Kanaka Dasa a great composer and social reformer, He was primarily a Lord Narayana devotee. He was a devotee of Vyasaraja of Udupi. He wanted to go to the Udupi Krishna temple to get a darshan of the Lord, but the strict priests wouldn't let him in because they thought he was of lower birth. Kanaka Dasa was devastated and cried out to Sri Krishna. The idol of Sri Krishna turned toward him and he was able to have a direct Darshan as the temple wall immediately collapsed on one side and a slit appeared in the Sanctum. The wall was subsequently remade, however a little window was worked there to stamp where the Ruler gave Darshan to his anguished fan. Kanakana Hindi – Kanaka's Window is the name of this window. Devotees can still view the Lord through this window prior to entering the sanctum's main entrance. The radical poet Kanaka Dasa wrote Kirtanas and Ugabhogas that are still used as traditional recitations in Carnatic music today[9].

CONCLUSION/FINDINGS

Shivasharanas and Haridasas of Karnataka have carved a niche for themselves in the Pan Indian situation also. It is a noteworthy feature of the movement in Karnataka that it began as much a socio-political movement, as it was a religious phenomenon. Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Akkamahadevi and Siddarama the leaders of this movement had a retinue of followers who belonged to many castes that were then considered lowly. Shivasharanas, the Veerashiva saints of the twelfth century were not insider critics of Hinduism. They spurned the Vedic hegemony in its entirety and preached Veerashivism which took little notice of the caste system. It did not hesitate to take the untouchables in to its fold. The movement had a literary component of lasting value in Vachana Sahitya. The movement was self-critical with its major proponents like Allama Prabhu and Basavanna being stark opponents of false Bhakti. Vachanas played a prominent role in the spread of this movement because they were composed in powerful Kannada. Ramanujacharya the founder of Sri Vaishnava Philosophy stayed in Karnataka for a brief stint and he is well known for trying to throw open the doors of his religion and Vedic knowledge to Dalits. Another important group that propagated Bhakti in Karnataka constitutes Haridasas who were votaries of the Dvaita religion ushered in by Madhvacharya. The Dasakuta component of this school led by Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa has preached the tenets of Bhakti within the parameters of their philosophical beliefs. Their Keerthanas were eminently successful in merging of literature and music in the service of Bhakti. Here again Sanskrit was pushed to the background. Some of the devotional lyrics by these savants and their successors have lasting merits.

Mathas (The Centres of institutionalized religion and castes) have played a dual role in the context of these movements. On the one hand they have received strong rebuttals by the leading lights of the movement for being too rigid. On the other hand, the Mathas have appropriated the movement and its literature and treating them as their own. Another aspect of Bhakti movement in Karnataka as elsewhere is the large scale participation of the devotees belonging to the backward and oppressed classes. Some of our oral folk epics such as 'Male Madeshvara Kavya' and 'Manteswamy Kavya' have furthered the cause of Bhakti in their own unique way. They are essentially the body of devotional writings created with Dalits and villagers at the centre stage. Veerashiva saints such as Nijagunashivayogi, Muppina Shadakshari, and Sarpabhushan Shiva yogi et cetera furthered this movement by their songs and lifestyle. This tradition was later encouraged by saints such as Shishunala Sharif, Kadakola Madivalappa, and Nagalinga Yogi and Kaivara Naranappa. Their compositions are called 'Tattvada Padagalu' (Philosophical songs). They and their ilk continue to yield a considerable influence even to this day. Bhakti, as a pathway to God finds many a supporter even in these days of uncertainty and rationality.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There is wide scope for the Research Scholars and Teachers to conduct a Research on An Evaluation of Saints and Teachers of Bhakti Movement. Present study is having good future towards Minor and Major research projects.

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